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THE RIGHT TO DEVELOPMENT

Written statement submitted by the Transnational Radical Party, a non-governmental organization in general consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement, which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[3 February 1999]

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1. The fact that democracy, development and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms are interdependent and mutually reinforcing has been proclaimed numerous times by various United Nations bodies. At last year's session, the Commission on Human Rights also recognized that the "Declaration on the Right to Development constitutes an integral link between the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action through its elaboration of a holistic vision integrating economic, social and cultural rights with civil and political rights" and urged "all States to eliminate all obstacles to development at all levels, by pursuing the promotion and protection of economic, social, cultural, civil and political rights and by implementing comprehensive development programmes at the national level, integrating these rights into development activities, and by promoting effective international cooperation" (Commission resolution 1998/72).

2. However, certain States continue to deny fundamental human rights on the grounds that these rights are incompatible with the right to adequate economic and social development. This position, which fails to understand that promoting and protecting all human rights are a necessary precondition to sustainable development, is often based on excluding any participation of an individual in public life, thus contradicting the affirmation of the Commission that "effective popular participation is an essential component of successful and lasting development" and that "the human person is the central subject of development and that development policy should therefore make the human being the main participant and beneficiary of development" (resolution 1998/72).

3. The Transnational Radical Party wishes to address this issue through four examples: the recent economic and political development in Viet Nam, the collapse of the economy of the People's Democratic Republic of Korea and China's development of Tibet, East Turkestan and Inner Mongolia. In all these cases, development schemes resting on the failure to honour the fundamental rights and freedoms have not provided an adequate and fair distribution of resources and are economically and socially unsustainable. In other words, one or all the three factors necessary for the achievement of sustainable human development - the government, civil society and enterprises - and therefore also the dynamics between them failed to or was not allowed to fulfil its function of enabling the people to develop their potentials and to elevate their standard of living.

4. Viet Nam has stagnated for many years in poverty and backwardness. The principle of democratic centralism and the one-party totalitarian State system appear to have favoured the development of corruption and have represented a barrier to building prosperity in Viet Nam. Although the unexpected release last year of some of the best-known political prisoners in Viet Nam and the newly-installed Communist Party leadership were promising steps, it seems they were only a ploy to reduce international pressure on Hanoi for its human rights practices, and to obtain more financial aid for the ailing economy. In 1998, arbitrary detention in sub-standard prison camps continued, press freedoms remained strictly curtailed, independent associations and trade unions were not allowed to operate, and little progress was made in legal reform.

5. Vietnamese farmers continued to demonstrate their anger over rampant corruption, punitive taxation, unfair rice prices, land disputes and compulsory labour contributions to national infrastructure projects. In March 1998, at least nine local people were convicted for disturbing public order during the January clashes in Dong Nai province. In July, the People's Court in Thai Binh sentenced more than 30 local people, whom the Government termed "extremists", to prison terms for inciting people to disrupt public order during uprisings in the province in November 1997. In March an anti-corruption ordinance was passed that contained provisions requiring officials to declare their assets, but a draft law to facilitate the filing of complaints by citizens against local officials failed to pass in the National Assembly. In an effort to control information about the regional economic crisis and its impact on Viet Nam, the Ministry of Culture continued to implement a 1997 press edict that prohibited media coverage of the banking system and instructed editors to tone down critical economic coverage.

6. The Hanoi regime continued its systematic elimination, harassment and suppression of the voices demanding freedom of speech and democratization of the country. The dissidents Ha Si Phu, Bui Minh Quoc and Tieu Dao Bao Cu, and their families were repeatedly subjected to attacks and placed under house arrest. In an effort to mute critics within its own ranks, the Vietnamese Communist Party expelled Tran Do, a retired general, at the beginning of 1999, after he repeatedly asked the Party's leadership to make reforms, democratize the country and hold free elections. On 6 January 1999, the regime executed two men, Huynh Te Cam and Tran Van Thuan, accused of plotting to topple the Communist regime. These are clear signals that the authorities of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam are not only neglecting their obligations under the two International Covenants on Human Rights, but also refuse to understand that only a policy of deep political and economic reform, the full establishment of the rule of law and opening up to a market economy and competition can contribute to the progressive improvement of the grave situation of this country.

7. The People's Democratic Republic of Korea has been experiencing similar political and economic development in the past decades. Its failed economic and agricultural policies under the totalitarian Communist regime undoubtedly contributed decisively to the tragic consequences of the natural disasters of 1995-1997. The omnipresent famine, starvation and energy crisis has continued to deteriorate for four years now. Industrial production is at a standstill. Despite the gravity of the situation, in which an estimated 30 per cent of children are suffering from severe malnutrition and millions of people are at risk, the authorities keep their people extremely isolated and put restrictions on visits to the country and on access to impartial information, preventing the assessment of the exact scale of the famine, as well as proper monitoring of the food aid given. Some NGOs - the International Committee of the Red Cross and Médecins Sans Frontières - and United Nations agencies - notably the United Nations Development Programme - continue to provide humanitarian aid and improve agricultural productivity through concrete projects. However, in view of the repeatedly demonstrated unwillingness of the Pyongyang regime to start any serious political and economic reforms, there are chances of improving the situation substantially.

8. China has signed the International Covenants on Human Rights. China has nonetheless taken the position that the right of its citizens to adequate food and shelter outweigh all other human rights. In practice, however, China has failed to provide fair or adequate resources for the people in its annexed territories, in Tibet, East Turkestan and Inner Mongolia. The failure is directly traceable to China's failure to honour these peoples' fundamental rights and freedoms. The case of Mr. Hada, founder of the Southern Mongolian Democracy Alliance, who was arrested in 1997 on a charge of separatism and sentenced to 15 years' imprisonment and deprived of political rights for a period of four years, shows clearly the destiny of numerous political opponents who are serving long sentences in Chinese prisons. The development scheme in place in these regions, moreover, shows every sign of being unsustainable.

9. The development scheme in Tibet, East Turkestan and Inner Mongolia rests on two foundations: (i) decisions made by central planners in Beijing; and (ii) population transfer of Chinese settlers into these regions. These two foundations ensure that Tibetans, Uighurs and Mongols do not participate in development decisions regarding their homelands, and that development primarily benefits Chinese settlers, Chinese investors and the Chinese authorities. One notable example is the World Food Programme project for the Lhasa River valley, carried out without Tibetan participation. Another is the Panam project, blocked by the European Union because of the lack of Tibetan participation.

10. In August 1998, Xinhua, the official Chinese press service, announced the completion of 60 development projects in Tibet, among 62 projects that had been planned by Beijing. Tibetans did not participate in the planning or implementation of these projects. These project, moreover, were intended primarily "to enhance foreign investment" in Tibet and were concentrated in urban areas dominated by Chinese settlers. Few reached the vast majority of Tibetans who live in rural areas. In December 1998, the Chinese authorities announced additional preferential policies to attract foreign investment to Tibet.

11. Tibetans, Uighurs and Mongols suffer discrimination in employment by the Chinese settlers and cadres who control most jobs. The average yearly income of the Uighurs, Tibetans and Mongols amounts to about one quarter to one third of the income of Chinese settlers. Inadequate and costly schools for these peoples and Chinese language requirements also prevent them from participating fully in their country's economy. Other stark indicators are education and health. In 1996, China acknowledged to the Committee on the Rights of the Child that 33 per cent of Tibetan school-age children receive no education at all compared with a mere 1.5 per cent of Chinese children. In addition, a 1996 study shows that, although the height of Chinese children has increased over the past 20 years, the height of Tibetan children is actually declining, probably owing to nutritional deficiencies and generally inadequate health care. The high cost of hospitals, moreover, puts all but the most minimal health care out of reach of most Tibetans, Uighurs and Mongols, with the result that almost 70 per cent of illnesses are fatal.

12. Chinese-controlled economic development, therefore, is not providing Tibetans, Uighurs and Mongols with an adequate or fair measure of economic opportunity. Their inability to participate in development decisions and aggressive population transfer are aimed at maintaining political control over the territories, not at raising the standard of living of Tibetans, Uighurs and Mongols as such.

13. The Transnational Radical Party calls upon the Commission to request that the open-ended working group on the right to development (Commission resolution 1998/72 and Economic and Social Council decision 1998/269) pays particular attention at its next meetings to the issue of popular participation in development, and that the working group discusses and documents the particular ways in which failure to ensure or the denial of popular participation impedes the achievement of sustainable human development and the realization of the right to development.